

Briefing Report: Use of Chronologies in Children's Services

REPORT OF Nick Bryning

AGENDA ITEM: 6

Reason for this Report

1. To inform the panel about the use of chronologies in Children's Services case management practice.

The panel asked that Children's Services provide this information following its consideration of lessons learned from a case management review that included recommendations in respect of the use of chronologies.

Background

2. Social work assessments of the needs of children and their families have always included consideration of the significance of past events in the lives of children and their parents and carers in forming judgements regarding the child's situation.
3. Chronologies are a means of compiling information about significant events in the lives of children and their families, and enable the significance of an individual event to be seen in the context of those that occurred previously and subsequently.
4. The overall chronology can inform assessment and decision making in respect of the child.
5. Chronologies are routinely developed in Children's Services and the electronic client record system includes provision to support practitioners in this task.
6. A chronology is required to be completed in all cases where a Core Assessment is undertaken so that the chronology of events can inform the assessment. Following the core assessment social workers are expected to maintain the chronology so that it can continue to be used to inform ongoing assessment and care planning for the child. Chronological ordering of the child's experiences and family history assists risk assessment and decision making for children who are the subject of child protection enquiries and child protection planning and also for looked after children. An extract from an anonymised chronology for looked after child is attached at Appendix 3.

7. In legal proceedings to safeguard children the Family Court requires a chronology in addition to the local authority's statement, care plan and application forms. A copy of advice on preparation of a court chronology is attached at Appendix 1 and an anonymised example is at Appendix 2.
8. Chronologies are also required to support the Children's Assessment Report for Adoption (CARA) in respect of children for whom the care plan is that consideration be given to meeting their needs through placement with an adoptive family, and when Children's Services conducts a formal management review of a case, including when this is undertaken as part of a Local Safeguarding Children Board Serious Case Review.
9. Government commissioned inquiries into child deaths and other specific concerns relating to children have made use of chronologies to inform their understanding of the circumstances that led up to events, and their judgements about opportunities to safeguard and promote children's welfare that might have been missed and lessons that should be learned.
10. The reports of the enquiries into the deaths of Victoria Climbié and Peter Connolly both highlighted the importance of chronologies for practitioners and managers in reaching an understanding of the experiences of children and their needs.

Issues

11. Essentially, chronologies list in date order the significant events in a child's life and the involvement of agencies in supporting the family as a means of creating an ordered overview of those events for analysis. Typically the events include changes in the make up of the family (births, deaths, other changes), changes of address, school health care arrangements, periods of ill health or medical treatment, injuries or harm, reported incidents of domestic violence, substance misuse, criminal and anti-social behaviour, school attendance and educational attainment, employment of parents/carers, legal changes or interventions, information base from observations by Children's Services staff and those provided from other agencies (for example information from health visitors about children's development, take up of immunisation and other health care).
12. The chronology assists social workers, managers and others in understanding the immediate or cumulative impact of these events on the child. While each event in itself might seem particularly significant analysis of the accumulation of seemingly unrelated and/or repeated events might enable professionals to identify key issues and patterns that need to be addressed including risk of significant harm. The analysis requires professionals to use professional knowledge, understanding and judgement in evaluating the significance of specific events and the accumulation of events.
13. The increased recognition of the usefulness of chronologies in a range of practice situations has required greater focus on training social workers in their compilation and use. This is supported by routine supervision but also

by providing coaching for social workers that enables them to develop expertise in gathering and assessing information. .

CONCLUSIONS

14. Chronologies are a core component of social work assessments and are also used to inform care planning and decision making in a variety of contexts, including in the decision making of the Courts.
15. Development of the skills of managers and practitioners in preparing chronologies and making effective use of them will continue to take place through supervision, coaching and mentoring and other training and development opportunities.

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Chief Officer

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The following Appendices are attached

Appendix 1. legal trainers notes for Social Workers on completion of court chronologies.

Appendix 2. anonymised chronology for court.

Appendix 3. Sample of anonymised chronology for a young person who is looked after